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ABSTRACT

This bulletin provides an update on current developments in core skills in further education. Section 1 contains information about the Further Education Unit's (FEU's) Core Skills Post-16 project, in which colleges are testing principles that underpin all good quality learning programs. Important findings and examples are outlined under the five headings corresponding to the five draft principles: curriculum development, action planning, teaching and learning strategies, recording and reviewing learning, and institutional management of core skills development. Section 2 is an invitation to readers to offer comments to FEU on the possible purposes of core skills and some other key issues. Section 3 consists of an update on the national core skills initiative and related developments, including National Vocational Qualifications and ordinary and advanced diplomas. The table in Section 4 provides a guide to the ways in which some current core skills-related terminology is used. For each term, an interpretation, source of usage, and list of skills/characteristics are presented. (YLB)

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February 1992

CORE SKILLS IN ACTION

ED344049

INTRODUCTION

This is the second Further Education Unit (FEU) bulletin about core skills. The first, *The Core Skills Initiative* (December 1990) was written, as the title suggests, in response to a particular initiative which began with Kenneth Baker's suggestion for a core curriculum for further education. The progress of the initiative is documented in that publication and an update on current developments is provided in this bulletin.

At the time of going to press, we know that both the Schools Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC) and the National Council for Vocational Qualifications (NCVQ) have submitted their recommendations on the *assessment of core skills within qualifications* to the Department of Education and Science (DES). They have done this in the light of the evidence from the exemplification exercise which they were asked to carry out, on the basis of the definitions agreed between the National Curriculum Council (NCC), FEU, SEAC, NCVQ and the Curriculum Council for Wales (CCW).

The world being what it is, we may well find that the Minister's response reaches you at the same time as this bulletin. That response may be positive, negative or conditional. However, the timing of the response is still uncertain and we have therefore decided to issue this bulletin in the form of a consultative document. In it we present some findings from our Core Skills Post-16 project, and key issues which arise from these. We suggest some possible purposes which core skills can serve and invite you to respond to both the findings and the purposes with your comments and supporting evidence. This will then influence both our response and the production of a second edition of this document.

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Many colleges have already done a lot of work on the development of core skills, realising that this work is not just about one more national initiative but about making the individual learner more effective, and helping to guarantee the quality of the learning programme so that overall achievement is increased. Colleges are reporting that both students and staff are finding benefit from identifying core skills within present programmes, developing to the full the opportunities that exist for enhancing them, and monitoring progress across the curriculum in core skills. The indications are that these activities may be improving attainment even as currently assessed, and be giving greater shape and purpose to references and tutorial activity.

One college, for example, has reported improved attendance at tutorials which involved the recording and reviewing of progress in core skills achievements, even though they were timetabled at the end of the day. There was a feeling amongst students and staff that the tutorials were both more productive in themselves, and a better contribution to performance in the rest of the curriculum. Other colleges report that core skills developed while still using existing A-level syllabuses provide the main vehicle through which subject content can be taught: recording of achievement in this context has also increased the amount of valid and reliable information and evidence required for the completion of the Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA) and the Polytechnic Centralised Admissions System (PCAS) forms.

All this has been happening without any overall increase in the resources allocated to the learning programmes in question. In other words, it may be that the overt identification of core skills and the systematic monitoring of progress in this area will prove to be cost effective. If true, this could be an extremely important finding.

This sort of work has been going on, sometimes for many years, often as part of other initiatives such as the Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI), Certificate of Pre-Vocational Education (CPVE), Youth Training (YT) or the Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC), and will continue to do so whether or not there are national definitions of core skills, and whatever those definitions may be.

Feedback from the further education (FE) system shows that what is needed is some guidance on the generic processes involved in core skills development and implementation, and advice about what the current initiative and other related ones, mean for students, staff and institutions. There is also a pressing need for clarification of the terminology used in relation to core skills.

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The bulletin is in four sections to address the issues raised in this introduction:

- information about FEU's *Core Skills Post-16* project, with examples and some of the interim findings from the colleges involved;
- an invitation to you to offer comments to FEU on the possible purposes of core skills and some other key issues;
- an update on the national core skills initiative and related developments;
- a table which provides a simple guide to the ways in which some of the current core skills related terminology is used.

1. POST-16 CORE SKILLS: AN FEU PROJECT

What is the project about?

The project is based on the assumption that core skills development is about improving levels of achievement for all learners and helping to guarantee the quality of learning programmes.

In order to do this, FEU advocates the creation of a set of principles which should underpin all good quality learning programmes, academic or vocational, especially if they seek to foster and develop core skills. These principles can be identified, and then put into operation through a series of activities which institutions, staff and students can carry out.

FEU has developed a draft set of principles and activities which are being trialled and tested by the colleges involved in the project. The project will be completed in September 1992.

Which core skills are the colleges using?

The colleges are using core skills which correspond as closely as possible to the six core skills specified in the National Curriculum Council's (NCC) publication *Core Skills 16-19* (March 1990). These are:

- communication
- problem-solving
- personal skills
- numeracy
- information technology
- a modern language

Which definitions are they using?

The project began before the development of national definitions in response to the then Secretary of State's request in November 1990. The colleges in the project have therefore used existing definitions such as those for BTEC, CPVE and YT (see the table at the end of this bulletin).

What are FEU's draft principles about?

The draft principles cover five main interconnected elements of curriculum development and implementation (1-5 below) which are considered necessary for the fostering of core skills in particular as well as the quality of the overall learning programme.

However, they should be seen as forming an ideal model. It might not be possible to develop all these areas equally or at the same time. A college could select those which are realistically achievable and/or decide to concentrate on the development of one area e.g. teaching and learning strategies.

The draft principles are general guidelines, outlined below under five headings, which can be implemented through a set of activities related to each of the areas. They are currently in draft form and being tested by the colleges.

1. Curriculum development

   - joint planning by teams who teach on the course or programme in order to agree on a core skills framework and jointly develop teaching / learning / recording / assessment procedures.

2. Action planning

   - showing students explicitly what core skills are, how they will be taught / learned / recorded / assessed in their course or learning programme, and linking previous core skills experience to future targets for progress and achievement.

3. Teaching and learning strategies

   - the provision of a range of teaching and learning strategies and a variety of environments to facilitate core skills development.

4. Recording and reviewing learning

   - the provision of a regular structured time when core skills achievement is recognised, reviewed and assessed by both teacher and learner using a record of achievement and performance criteria which are understood by both.

5. Institutional management

   - the support of core skills development by the implementation of an overall college strategy and the deployment and co-ordination of resources which encourage the development of elements 1-4 above.

- **Are the core skills being integrated?**

Where possible without distortion of the qualification, colleges are integrating the core skills into the curricula of two types of courses or learning programmes but making them explicit for the purposes of recording achievement.

What sort of courses are involved?

Colleges are doing this with a range of learning programmes – full and part-time vocational courses, A levels in a variety of subjects, and with adult learners. Some of the colleges are attempting a whole college approach to the development of core skills.

All the colleges involved offer BTEC courses and they are therefore quite experienced in the development of the common skills. This has been helpful, especially in increasing acceptance of the importance of common skills in the curriculum, but experience indicates that it does not necessarily guarantee high quality core skills implementation.

- BTEC teams in different occupational areas rarely work together or with those working on academic programmes even in the same college, and the commitment of staff to the principles and practice of common skills is often variable, as is the quality of the implementation.

- Colleges working on the project with BTEC courses must obviously adhere to the BTEC framework. However, FEU is more widely concerned with the generic processes and practice involved in developing core skills across a range of different learning programmes and in highlighting the implications for all learners, teachers and curriculum managers.

What do the colleges do in the project?

Some colleges are using FEU's draft principles to enhance their BTEC and vocational qualifications especially with part-time students, others are using them to develop core skills in programmes such as A level and GCSE where none exist already as part of the certification and accreditation framework.

The colleges in the project are testing the draft principles by trialling a series of activities associated with each of the five elements above.

What have they achieved so far?

Some of the most important findings are outlined below under the five headings along with examples of what the colleges have achieved. At this stage the work has not been fully evaluated and a final publication planned for 1992 will give more detailed case studies. However, for those considering core skills development or already involved in it, the examples may provide new ideas or endorsement of their own work.

1. Curriculum development – findings

a. An audit of existing provision:

- is useful in highlighting the existence of core skills in an existing syllabus or programme of study;

- motivates staff by making explicit what core skills work is being done and providing a structure for further development;

- needs to take into account learners' perceptions of where core skills are being learned already;

- should be used as an aid to development rather than be too detailed and complex an end in itself.

b. Team meetings for curriculum development:

- need to be held regularly for all course team members even if not everyone is able to attend all of them;

- can mix staff membership e.g. A level Humanities or Science subjects together; BTEC different occupational areas;

- can be used for specific tasks e.g. preparation and marking of assignments, or discussion of issues such as agreement of core skills definitions and criteria for assessment;

- can be used as a vehicle for staff/institutional development.

Curriculum development – examples

i. Core skills audit in A levels

A-level staff carried out an audit across three existing syllabuses – English, Psychology and Physics – and found that different core skills were being delivered by all subjects but to varying degrees in each. As a result of the audit, each subject lecturer is trying to improve the breadth of their curriculum via their course delivery e.g. more emphasis on

oral communication in Physics, and greater emphasis on using different forms of language for different purposes in English and Psychology.

ii. Team approaches

Regular team meetings are held to provide a positive and practical vehicle for team work and staff development. Individual members lead core skills-related activities such as 'mini teach-ins' followed by analysis, team marking of student exercises and development of assignments *across* programme areas to reinforce the commonality between them.

2. Action planning – findings

a. Learners' understanding and awareness of core skills:

- require core skills definitions, strategies for development and criteria for assessment, to be made explicit for, and understood by, the learner;
- need to be related to previous achievement through e.g. records of achievement;
- need to begin with the induction process post-16;
- can be enhanced by intensive explicit core skills work early in the learning programme.

b. Learners' valuing of core skills:

- can be encouraged by showing how core skills underpin, and are the vehicle for, learning in general and in other areas of their learning programme;
- is enhanced by helping learners to understand the relevance of the skills to employment, higher education and other areas of life;
- is increased if their own language, concepts and examples are used rather than jargon or educational language.

Action planning – examples

i. Introduction to core skills

A team consisting of different subject lecturers planned awareness-raising sessions for A-level students to show the importance of core skills and share this perception with them. The sessions included the presentation and analysis of different learning styles, problem-solving exercises in groups and research exercises entailing the manipulation of numeracy skills.

ii. Student-led action planning

Student-designed pro formas have been used as a way of increasing students' value and ownership of core skills. Student-led action planning and setting of targets has resulted in greater motivation, particularly amongst the mature students on Access courses.

3. Teaching and learning strategies – findings

a. The use of a range of teaching and learning strategies:

- can develop core skills without distorting the qualification;
- needs to be discussed at the curriculum planning stage so that appropriate work or assignments can be designed;
- should include seminars, group work, supported self-study, practical work, as well as lectures;
- can motivate students if they are helped to use the different methods effectively;
- is likely to require increased staff development on how to use the strategies to deliver the curriculum.

b. The use of a variety of different learning environments:

- can enhance core skill development which would be more difficult to foster in a classroom;
- can include whatever is available, e.g. library and/or learning centre, workshop and/or laboratory, the local environment or community, the workplace;
- may need further resource-based development within the college;
- is likely to require staff development on how to use and manage the environments.

Teaching and learning – examples

i. Core skills and employers

A meeting between college staff and local employers was set up to identify which core skills were being delivered in the workplace. One outcome was the increased commitment to core skills from work experience supervisors. A-level students taking part in a work-shadowing exercise analysed the core skills used in occupations which they were considering following in their future careers.

ii. Making a video

Students made a video of the college orchestra in action. This activity provided scope for the development and recognition of a wide range of core skills and students felt that they had benefited from this.

4. Recording and reviewing learning – findings

a. A structured time for recording and reviewing core skills achievement:

- can be one element of review of learning in other areas;
- may be part of a tutorial system;
- should include some time on a one-to-one basis with a tutor;
- may include self and peer review or assessment.

b. Making explicit to students the criteria for assessing core skills achievement:

- is vital even where assessment is not part of accreditation for a qualification;
- should make clear whether a process and skills are being assessed, or the product/outcome;
- should take account of a variety of evidence of achievement, not just written outcomes.

c. Recording of achievement in core skills:

- needs to be part of a single user-friendly system;
- needs to link with an ongoing action plan and feedback to the learning programme so that future needs can be met;
- may need to highlight core skills achievement where it is embedded in the curriculum.

Recording and reviewing – examples

i. Using the tutorial/review process

Students use an integrated system of action planning, recording, reviewing of learning linked by a student contract. All tutor groups are timetabled for two hours per week in which active work using a student log book fosters personal development and core skills. Every tutor has an additional hour for individual tutorial work where action planning occurs. Students initiate a termly review meeting with subject lecturers and convey documentation from this negotiated review of their progress to their tutor.

ii. A dialogue about learning

This dialogue between teachers and learners on A-level programmes has a variety of contexts: the last 10-15 minutes of a lesson; written feedback; a mid-term review interview. The dialogue can be given focus by 'assessment' and 'descriptor' sheets developed by the team. These will provide an opportunity for analysing individual strengths and weaknesses, long- and short-term goals and progress in core skills development.

5. Management of core skills development – findings

a. The development of a college curriculum strategy:

- needs to include a core skills policy, implemented by a manager or group;
- will be more effective if linked to other related developments in the college.

b. The support of college senior management:

- is necessary for effective core skills implementation;
- should encourage core skills development by appropriate deployment of staff and resources;
- needs to include a policy for appropriate staff development.

Management of core skills development – examples

i. Staff development

A questionnaire was circulated to investigate staff attitudes to core skills and to recruit volunteers to develop this area of work. A staff development programme was set up to allow teams to take part in development work on the curriculum and materials. A core skills awareness day was held for all staff to examine the concept of core skills and to discuss the planned provision.

ii. Staffing of tutorials

In one college which has some separate core skills/studies on the timetable, tutorial periods are double-staffed with one subject specialist and one core skills specialist. This allows individual reviewing to take place if required and creates closer co-operation between the staff and their areas of the curriculum.

iii. Organisation of syllabus and timetables

Parts of the first year A-level syllabus have been unitised and the delivery of the units synchronised so that joint assignment work can be delivered across subject areas.

Which colleges are involved?

Twelve colleges in four FEU regions are involved, trialling the draft principles with two types of learning programmes in each college. The colleges are managed by the relevant FEU Regional Development Officer (RDO) and the whole project is co-ordinated by an FEU Central Development Officer.

Northern Region	West Midlands
Newcastle Darlington Peterlee	Dudley Walsall
RDO Maria Hughes	RDO Gabriella Braun
London & South East	Yorkshire & Humberside
Newham Richmond Kingsway Milton Keynes	Calderdale Grimsby Hull
RDO Rosemary Moorse	RDO Debbie Thornton

Central Development Officer: Sue Rawlinson

These are colleges with a commitment to the principles and practice of core skills, and experience and expertise in this area. Each college has a project co-ordinator who is a member of a senior management team in the area of curriculum development.

However, core skills development is a complex process and while college contacts generally welcome enquiries, they wish to make it clear that theirs are not necessarily 'expert' opinions. Information on their efforts towards developing and fostering core skills is offered in the spirit of sharing a learning experience with colleagues.

2. AN INVITATION TO RESPOND TO OUR FINDINGS

A. Possible purposes of core skills

The main purpose of the core skills initiative as proposed to SEAC by the Secretary of State for Education in 1989 (John McGregor) was to ensure:

'Whether they go into employment direct or via higher education, all students need to be equipped to take their place in a modern economy as well as to be competent in every way to function in adult life generally.'

This seems to be a good, general description of what the initiative might achieve but from our experience on the project, and of work generally within the further education system, we have been able to identify, within this, what may be some more explicit purposes of core skills. The way in which people view the position and value of core skills probably depends upon the primary purpose they have in mind for them.

Below we identify a number of possible purposes, and ask your views on the ones to which you would give greatest priority. We would also be very interested in evidence that you have which might show the extent to which these purposes have in fact been achieved in given circumstances.

The possible purposes which might be served are that:

1. **The assessment of core skills could help to provide evidence for progression purposes.**

   Core skills achievement which is recorded as part of an ongoing process of recording of achievement could provide evidence for progression e.g. to higher education or employment, where information about skills and abilities is often required in addition to the specific subject content of a qualification.

Paper-based evidence may need to be produced in the form of references; ideally, this would be based on the learner having had the opportunity to develop a certain skill, such as **'working effectively with others in groups of different sizes'**, make progress and exhibit achievement which is then recorded.

2. **The definition of core skills could increase accountability.**

   If as in 1. (above) it is made explicit **to the learner as well as the teacher** that opportunities will be made for the development of certain skills in the learning programme, this could increase accountability because the learner is able to see whether or not these are being delivered.

   Many successful teachers develop these skills in learners but are not often aware that they are doing so. Making the skills explicit could help the teachers to see where they are already successful and where there are skill gaps which they can fill.

3. **The acquisition of core skills could increase overall attainment.**

   If, as is suggested by many people in industry as well as education, core skills such as problem-solving and communication actually underpin successful performance and enhance it, it may be that the structured development of those skills may lead to a measurable increase in attainment. This might be shown by the achievement of higher grades in qualifications or improved performance at work by learners who have had access to core skills development.

4. **The identification of an assessment of core skills could contribute to the parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications.**

   If the two types of qualifications are to have parity of esteem, then one of the ways in which this could happen is if both types were to develop skills and knowledge which are valuable in a variety of contexts - work, higher education or life in general - whatever the subject or vocational content of the individual qualification.

   If core skills are seen as necessary in some qualifications e.g. as common skills in BTEC, or through the development of GNVQs, then their development in NVQs and Advanced level qualifications would go some way to creating parity of esteem.

   The suggested purpose of using achievement in core skills alone to achieve credit transfer (give exemption from one part of a qualification for achievement in a different qualification) is now thought to be unworkable other than as part of a much wider credit framework which would include other skills and knowledge.

5. **Core skills could be shown to be cost-effective by reducing drop-out rates.**

   FEU suggests that implementation of the core skills includes action-planning and target-setting for learners, as part of a system of formative recording of progress and achievement within a tutorial or similar setting. It may be that this sort of supportive system which gives some emphasis to ensuring that learning is taking place helps learners who might otherwise struggle with coursework, creates better teacher-learner relationships, and reduces the numbers who might otherwise leave a course or learning programme without having achieved a qualification.

6. **The inclusion of core skills could add breadth and continuity to post-16 curricula.**

   Most of the core skills described in this bulletin could probably be included in curricula without adding breadth in the form of content or subject matter. What their inclusion could mean is that learners are offered breadth in other forms such as: a broader range of skills; a variety of teaching and learning strategies; access to different working environments; a greater understanding of their own learning processes and the ongoing recording of progress in these.

   Explicit core skills development is still in its early stages in the National Curriculum but the skills are embedded in the pre-16 curriculum. Their development post 16 could build on earlier achievements and continue to be recorded, in part, by the National Record of Achievement. Current variation in the range of pre-16 experience which have been noted by teachers post 16 may improve as the National Curriculum implementation process continues.

B. Key questions arising from recent findings

Depending on which purposes you think most important, you might also like to comment on some of the key questions arising. These are:

i. Have you found that explicit, clearly understood definitions of core skills can be usefully applied across both academic and vocational learning programmes?

ii. To what extent do you need performance criteria and range statements for core skills in **addition to** explicit definitions for the following purposes:

   a. curriculum planning and development?
   b. formative recording of progress in core skills?
   c. assessment for certification purposes?

iii. How helpful do you think it is for achievement in each core skill to be certificated separately and should the awarding of a qualification depend upon given performance in core skills?

iv. Have you any evidence of the effect on learners of making core skills explicit to them? When and how is this best done?

v. How is it possible to assess the **process** which the learner uses in skills such as problem-solving rather than just the **outcome** i.e. the finished piece of work?

vi. What, in your experience, have been the resource implications of attempts to introduce core skills? Is it possible to achieve significant benefits within existing resource envelopes, by making better use of tutorial time, amending approaches to teaching and learning in existing subjects, and so on?

vii. What is the role of employers in developing / assessing / recording core skills?

viii. What are the needs in terms of staff training and new materials development if core skills are to be made best use of?

In answering the above, you may wish to distinguish between the different core skills, and comment on whether some are more naturally embeddable in existing learning programmes and qualifications that others - and what the implications are of this.

We invite anyone working on core skills to respond to the points raised in this section of the bulletin. It would be valuable if you could comment on them from your own experience and/or provide any evidence for or against any of the statements. Please write to Sue Rawlinson at FEU.

3. CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS RELATED TO CORE SKILLS

1. The National Core Skills Initiative

Below is an update on the progress of the initiative mentioned in the introduction to this bulletin.

Definitions of core skills in communication, problem-solving, personal skills, numeracy, information technology and modern language, which could be common to both advanced level and vocational qualifications have been agreed by the national monitoring group set up in 1990 to steer the core skills initiative.

NCVQ and SEAC have responded to the Secretary of State for Education's request for the exemplification of these core skills in vocational and advanced level qualifications, and his reply is expected early in 1992.

2. National Vocational Qualifications

As part of the exemplification process in Section 1., NCVQ has developed core skills units expressed in a detailed form consisting of elements, performance criteria and range statements in **communication, problem-solving, improving own learning and performance, working with others, application of number, information technology**. The units are now being tested in a variety of vocational programmes and qualifications in 20 institutions. The response so far has indicated support for the concept of core skills in NVQs. NCVQ continues to support Lead Bodies in their progress towards incorporation of appropriate core skill units in NVQs.

NCVQ has been funded by the Government to develop 'general' national vocational qualifications (GNVQs) which will be deliverable within full-time programmes at schools and colleges. They will cover broad occupational areas, offering opportunities to develop the relevant knowledge and understanding and an appreciation of how to apply them at work. NCVQ has proposed that the core skill units be a major component of the proposed GNVQ qualifications and that the core skill areas mentioned above form an integral part of the specification. The core skill unit specifications are now available from NCVQ.

3. Ordinary and Advanced Diplomas

The current proposals for these diplomas which were outlined in the recent White Paper *Education and Training for the Twenty-first Century* were made available for consultation which was completed in October 1991.

The latest proposal is that the Advanced Diplomas will be awarded from 1994 onwards. They will be achieved through success in either three passes at advanced level, of which only two may be at A/S level, or in NVQ level three. Additional attainment in English, mathematics and a modern language from GCSE, A or A/S levels or from NVQs will be required for the award of a diploma.

The Diplomas seem to offer little more than a framework for existing qualifications. They assume that

- any acquisition of the six core skills will have taken place within the National Curriculum pre-16 and equate core skills for A/AS level students with achievement in English, mathematics, and a modern foreign language. Achievement in literacy and numeracy is suggested for vocational students.

In FEU's view, these proposals go only some way towards helping to develop breadth in the post-16 curriculum in the sort of skills, knowledge and experience increasingly required by employers or HE institutions.

4. The National Record of Achievement (NRA)

The new NRA which first came into use in Summer 1991 requires evidence of core skills achievements in the six NCC areas. This is welcome but the guidance which accompanies the NRA offers some very general examples and explains that evidence can be collected from a range of sources including work, school or leisure activities. The vague nature of the guidance and the open-ended format of the record are likely to lead to wide variations in content, consistency and acceptance.

5. Core themes

One of the ways in which breadth, in a content-based rather than skill-based form, could be provided within current qualifications frameworks is by development of core themes beyond the National Curriculum as suggested by NCC in its *Core Skills 16-19* proposals. FEU has initiated two projects to investigate how this might operate in the areas of Environmental Education and Economic and Industrial Understanding.

6. TVEI Extension Post-16

Discussions continue about the Common Learning Outcomes, about how they should be expressed and whether or not performance in them can be assessed. TVEI developments have contributed greatly, in many parts of the country, to the broadening of the post-16 curriculum in both academic and vocational learning programmes. Lessons need to be drawn from the best of its achievements and these need to be embedded into mainstream curricula to continue after its completion.

7. BTEC common skills

BTEC is developing more detailed guidance for the implementation and assessment of common skills after consultation with practitioners in its centres. There is still concern within colleges about assessment of the common skills, and feedback would suggest that BTEC needs to encourage greater confidence and consistency.

8. New City and Guilds of London Institute qualifications

i. The City and Guilds Diploma of Vocational Education, the successor to CPVE, will include 'core'. This will be as in Foundation Programmes for its new Foundation Diploma and as in CPVE for the New Intermediate and National Diplomas.

ii. The Technological Baccalaureate is seen by City and Guilds as providing, amongst other things, 'the core skills needed for NVQs, GNVQs and A level programmes'.

4. CORE SKILLS AND RELATED TERMINOLOGY

One of the difficulties with this area of work has been and continues to be the proliferation of initiatives over the past decade. These have usually aimed to provide a broad and balanced curriculum which will enable the learner to develop the sort of skills, knowledge and understanding which they will need in employment, further or higher education and life in general. However, there has been little attempt to link the initiatives and each has developed in addition to the others, often resulting in confusion and duplication of effort.

One of FEU's aims in its *Core Skills Post-16* project is to encourage colleges, at management, course team and lecturer levels, to find ways of linking the current related initiatives across the college.

Another way to ease the confusion is to offer some clarification on the current usage of 'core skills' and other similar or related terms. This section provides a simple guide by offering an interpretation of the terms along with the organisation or initiative with which they are currently associated.

The interpretations have been deliberately kept simple – where an organisation or initiative is involved, their own wording has been used as far as possible and further information can be obtained from them.

The table provides an *aide-mémoire*; it does not attempt a detailed analysis and comparison of the terms or of their functions, which could be variously, elements of curriculum design, delivery, performance or assessment.

Aficionados will no doubt be able to add others to the list.

TERM	INTERPRETATION	WHERE USED	LIST OF SKILLS/CHARACTERISTICS
core	**central part of different character from what surrounds it**	**Concise Oxford Dictionary**	
core	**areas of skills and knowledge considered central to a learner's work and life – developed through a learning programme**	**CPVE/Diploma of Vocational Education**	● communication and social skills ● applied numeracy ● science, technology and IT ● problem solving ● social, industrial and economic awareness ● personal and career development ● aesthetic and creative understanding
core subjects	compulsory subjects within the National Curriculum in England and in Wales, for some pupils the Welsh language	National Curriculum Council (NCC)	● English ● Mathematics ● Science ● Welsh (Wales)
subject core	central body of subject knowledge and understanding which must be offered in each A/AS syllabus by all examination boards	Schools Examination and Assessment Council (SEAC)	
core skills	set of transferable skills considered central to academic, vocational and personal development – emphasis on processes/abilities	NCC	● communication ● problem-solving ● personal skills ● numeracy ● information technology ● modern language
		Youth Training Scheme (now YT)	● communication ● problem-solving ● number ● practical skills
core themes	a vehicle for the development of common skills and competences relevant to adult and working life – emphasis on skills and knowledge	BTEC	examples include: ● economics ● ideas ● science and technology ● language ● people ● industry ● media
cross-curricular themes	strands of provision which will run through both national and post-16 curricula – emphasis on content, knowledge and understanding	NCC	● careers education and guidance ● health education ● economic and industrial understanding ● environmental education ● education for citizenship ● community understanding (Wales) ● scientific and technological understanding ● aesthetic and creative understanging
core curriculum	general term describing the central, often compulsory, part of any qualification, syllabus or learning programme – usually consists of content, skills and knowledge	general use	
common core	general term usually associated with **core curriculum** (see above) where the core is common to all learners within or across qualifications or learning programmes	general use	

common skills	set of transferable skills similar to **core skills** (above) but include additional skills and attitudes which develop personal effectiveness in working and adult life – common to all BTEC qualifications	BTEC	● communicating ● managing tasks and solving problems ● working with and relating to others ● managing and developing self ● applying numeracy ● applying technology ● applying design and creativity
common learning outcomes	key experiences or opportunities to which all learners are entitled, regardless of their programme of study – emphasis on skills and experiences	TVEI	● communicate effectively ● compile and use numerical information ● use science and technology appropriately ● understand the world of work ● develop effective personal and interpersonal skills ● work independently and in teams ● solve problems ● cope with change
common learning outcomes	core elements of vocational education and training to act as benchmarks of quality learning – emphasis on skills and knowledge	Confederation of British Industry *(Towards a Skills Revolution)*	● values and integrity ● effective communication ● applications of numeracy ● applications of technology ● understanding of work and the world ● personal and interpersonal skills ● problem-solving ● positive attitudes to change
core modules/core content	proposed method of providing compulsory content in a single post-16 qualification framework	Institute of Public Policy Research *(Proposals for a British Baccalaureate)*	
core processes	a set of processes which provide forms of learner support e.g. guidance and counselling	IPPR *(Proposals for a British Baccalaureate)*	● guidance and counselling ● induction and diagnosis of need ● formative assessment and learning support
core competences	the necessary skills, knowledge, attitudes and experience required for successful performance in a particular occupational area or role	FEU *(Core Competences in Engineering)* and general use	
core entitlement	general term often used as for **core curriculum** (above) but usually indicates that learners are entitled to additions to compulsory curriculum requirements	general use	
entitlement curriculum	general term usually used to describe a learning programme with enhanced content, skills or experiences offered in addition to the compulsory elements (can be one part of **curriculum entitlement**) below	general use	
curriculum entitlement	a framework which covers all aspects of the curriculum – content and skills, plus access, delivery and support systems – emphasis on breadth, flexibility, competence, learner-centredness	TVEI/FEU	● competence/qualifications ● records of achievement ● work-related activities ● flexible teaching and learning ● guidance and counselling
common curriculum framework	a multi-layered framework of content, skills and processes which would form the core of a common post-16 qualification	IPPR (as above)	
the core	used rather imprecisely as a catch-all phrase to denote all or any of the above, – useful to avoid showing ignorance or when specificity is inappropriate	general use	

FURTHER INFORMATION

For further information on core skills, please contact Sue Rawlinson of the Further Education Unit on ext. 313.

For further information on core themes, please contact Jim Bennett, c/o Welsh Joint Education Committee, Cyd-bwyllgor, Addysg Cymru, 245 Western Avenue, Caerdydd, CF5 2YX. Tel. 0222-561231, Fax. 0222-571234.

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